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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 001270

SIPDIS

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TAGS: SENV EPET PGOV I2

SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: OIL LEAK FROM AL-FAT'HA
CROSSING CREATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Classified By: Classified by Acting Economic Counselor Kevin Roland; reason 1.5 (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Salah ad Din reporting cable.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: A leak from the oil pipelines at the al-Fat'ha Crossing on April 30 forced Iraqi authorities to shut down water treatment plants along the Tigris for a limited duration. In an attempt to mitigate the environmental effects of the spill, the Ministry of Water Resources increased water flow into the Tigris and shut down the Samarra dam to divert the oil slick to Tharthar Lake so that it did not reach Baghdad. First Deputy Governor of Salah ad Din Ahmed Abul-Jabbar (Abu Abdullah) said neither the Northern Oil Company nor the Ministry of Oil had briefed the provincial leadership on the spill or progress with the clean-up effort. END SUMMARY.

Environmental Impact

¶3. (U) A leak from the pipelines in the vicinity of the al-Fat'ha Crossing on or about April 30 created an oil slick on the Tigris river. The current GOI plan for controlling fossil fuel spills is to allow the slick to travel down river to the Persian Gulf when possible. The GOI used booms to cordon off the spill, burned the material floating on the surface, and utilized the dam system to direct the slick to Tharthar Lake and allow the material to eventually sink. MoO officials have reported that the slick forced them to temporarily shut down Karkh and two other water treatment plants feeding Baghdad. (Note: The water treatment plant shut downs were of limited duration and potable drinking water supplies were not greatly affected. End Note.) In Tikrit, the Qada Council briefly discontinued water service to the municipality to prevent the oil slick from contaminating the municipal water supply.

Provincial Government Out of Loop

¶4. (C) Salah ad Din First Deputy Governor Ahmed Abdul-Jabbar (Abu Abdullah) told PRT officers on May 3 that neither the MoO nor the NOC had briefed the Provincial Government on the oil contamination or clean-up effort. Abu Abdullah said that he had spoken with the Ministry of Irrigation which had agreed to increase water flow in the Tigris by 850 cubic meters per second, which would raise the water level by 1.5 meters and help push the oil further south. He said the Samarra Dam will be closed to divert the oil slick to Tharthar Lake and prevent the contamination from reaching Baghdad.

Comment

¶5. (C) The oil spill was a significant ecological event with potentially adverse effects on health and agriculture along the river. One lesson from this incident is the need for greater communication between national-level entities like

the NOC and Bayji Oil Refinery and local/provincial authorities. It also highlights the need for a local and national plan to react to and mitigate the environmental impact of spills.

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